Chapter 8
Analyzing the Landscape of Social Media

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ABSTRACT
The rapid spread of social media provides a new reality for organizational communication and team collaboration. This also applies to projects and project management, where logical application areas are stakeholder engagement and team collaboration. This last application area will be most beneficial to international projects with geographically dispersed teams. However, the landscape of social media is not unified. There are remarkable differences between regions, countries and generations. This chapter explores these differences, by discussing different perspectives on the social media landscape.

INTRODUCTION
The emergence of the online social networks has been the most interesting web development in recent years (Wellman 2005). Social media are changing the way people communicate, share information and find information (Mayfield, 2008). The rapid spread of blogs, social networking sites, and media-sharing technology (such as YouTube), aided by the proliferation of mobile technology, provides a new reality for organizational communication and team collaboration. Social media therefore also provide opportunities for managers of projects and programs to communicate effectively with their team members or (external) stakeholders. However, in order for this communication via social media to be effective, it is important to use the media and channels that reaches the intended audience. And in the rapidly developing landscape of social media, these media and channels are rapidly changing and not unified. For managers of projects and programs it is therefore essential to understand the regional and generational differences in the social media landscape.

It is not easy to exactly describe what social media is/are. An often cited definition from Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) who define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User
Generated Content” (p.61). Elaborating on this definition, Werder et al. (2014), define social media as “a web-based service or platform based on web 2.0 technology that enables the sharing, co-creation, discussion and modification of user-generated content.”. This definition refers to social media as a specific application, whereas Kaplan and Haenlein refer to social media as “a group of … applications”. We experience that the term social media is most often used in the plural form, referring to a group of services or applications. However, which applications are considered to be included in this group is not always clear.

But also without an exact definition or boundary, the applications that may be considered as social media, together make up the ‘landscape’ of social media. This paper aims to provide project management professionals insight in this landscape. And more specifically, in the differences of this landscape when organized into certain perspectives. The reason for this being that the social media landscape is not unified as many assume. For example China is known for banning popular foreign social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, Dropbox, Picasa and Instagram. Rather than eliminating social media, these banns resulted in a flourishing state-approved set of Chinese-owned equivalents, such as Renren, Sina Weibo and Youku. And the Chinese social media are thriving. With a home market of over 640 million internet users, some Chinese social media are approaching the number of users of their Western equivalents. Also in Europe there are remarkable differences in the social media landscape. For example the well-known professional networking site LinkedIn has not succeeded to build a leading position in the German-speaking market (D-A-CH: Germany, Austria and Switzerland). German based Xing leads the DACH market of professional networking sites, with more members than LinkedIn.

For managers of international teams and projects, understanding these geographical differences in the social media landscape is crucial when selecting a social media strategy. But there are more aspects to take into account, for example age. The social media landscape is very dynamic and younger generations tend to be early adopters of new social media, sometimes with the motivation to have an alternative next to the mainstream social media that also older generations use.

As stated earlier, this chapter aims to give an overview of the social media landscape and to illustrate also differences in the landscape when organized into certain perspectives. In order to do this, the next paragraph first suggests some meaningful perspectives on the social media landscape. The subsequent sections than discuss the landscape of social media by these different perspectives.

The contribution this chapter makes to the topic of social media in project management, is that it makes project professionals aware of the fact that there is not one unified social media landscape. A project manager that wants to effectively apply social media in his or her project, either in the communication within the project team or in the communication with stakeholders, should tune his/her social media strategy to the needs and practices of the intended communication partner. Recognizing the differences in social media use amongst geographical regions, generations and other variables is a condition for an effective social media strategy. In general, and also in projects.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE SOCIAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE

As presented in the introduction of this chapter, it makes sense to consider the social media landscape through different perspectives. What perspectives are meaningful may provide an endless discussion. In the next sections, we discuss the social media landscape amongst the following perspectives.
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